

FOREWORD

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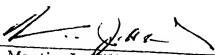
Paul R. Sweet, American Consul General, Stuttgart

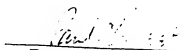
August 26, 1964

Mr. Sweet: Mr. Hillenbrand, you were Director of the Office of German Affairs in the Department of State during the entire acute period which began with the so-called Soviet ultimatum on Berlin November 27, 1958. When President Kennedy took office the Berlin crisis was well into its second year. I wonder how you would describe the situation as regards Berlin and the German question when President Kennedy took office.

Minister Hillenbrand: The Berlin crisis which, as you correctly say, began in November of 1958, was still very much with us at the time although Chairman Khrushchev had, in effect, declared a moratorium shortly after the collapse of the summit meeting in Paris in the spring of 1960 because, as he said, of the difficulty of negotiating with the Americans while they were having a national election. However, everyone assumed that, once the new administration had taken over, the Soviets would revive the Berlin threat and apply new pressure. No one at that time knew, of course, precisely what form this pressure would take, but there was a general atmosphere of anxious expectation of a new Soviet offensive against Berlin at the time the new administration came into office.

CONFIDENTIAL


Martin J. Hillenbrand
American Minister
Bonn


Paul R. Sweet
American Consul General
Stuttgart

Mr. Sweet: Did President Kennedy have to deal with German matters or Berlin almost as soon as he came into office?

Minister Hillenbrand: Not immediately, because the Soviets apparently had decided to allow for a certain period of organizational effort on the part of the new administration before applying pressure. The Soviets probably also had in mind that there would be a summit meeting between the President and Chairman Khrushchev fairly early in the new administration's life, and, of course, this actually took place. So, during the first few months he was in office, the President was able to devote his attention primarily to other matters. On the other hand, it was quite clear to any well-informed person that the subject of Berlin was one with which the President would have to come to grips at a fairly early stage, and his advisers both in the White House and in the State Department, were very aware of this.

Those of us in the State Department who had been dealing with the Berlin problem up to that point were encouraged to write memoranda and papers which would focus attention on the primary issues as we saw them and try to anticipate what might be expected from the Soviets. A number of such memoranda were produced, some of them of a historical nature and some of them of an analytical nature. I remember one paper particularly, which was prepared at the request of the White House and on which I worked for some time, called "The Problem of Berlin." It ran to some 30-odd pages. As I remember, this was sent over to the White House. I don't know whether the President read the whole paper, although he may have. In any event, it was an attempt to sum up our experience to that point in dealing with the Berlin problem, and I think it did help to some degree to focus attention on the issues which we, at least, thought were the important ones that would have to be faced.

I think it is also fair to say that, in these early days, some of the President's new team felt that there must be some new solution to the Berlin problem which could be pulled out of the hat and which a new administration, obviously possessed of a great deal of collective intelligence, would be able to devise. Our feeling in State, of course, was that there were no easy solutions to the Berlin problem, and our general recommendations were along these lines. This was going to be a long, hard pull; there were no panaceas, and the problem that would have to be met was essentially the same as the previous administration had had to face up to.

Mr. Sweet: Would you say then that the new President showed a fairly distinctive style in dealing with the German question almost from the outset, or does that put it too strongly?

Minister Hillenbrand: I would say that somewhat anticipates the reality. He certainly did develop a distinctive style of his own in dealing with the Berlin and German questions. But during the first few months, his major preoccupations were with other problems, apart from the general recognition that the Berlin problem was one he was going to have to come to grips with fairly early in the game.

Mr. Sweet: Had you ever had any contact with him when he was a Senator?

Minister Hillenbrand: I had had no contact with him during that period.

Mr. Sweet: Do you recall your first contact with him as President?

Minister Hillenbrand: As I remember, my first contact with him as President was during the visit of Chancellor Adenauer which took place in April of 1961. I was present at the White House lunch and at some of the working sessions. The discussions with Adenauer covered, as they inevitably had to, the problems of Germany and Berlin, but also

a range of other subjects as well. Adenauer's visit, of course, was primarily a sort of a "prise de contact," which he presumably hoped would lead to the kind of relationship with the President which he had had with the previous administration.

Mr. Sweet: In general what were your relations as Director of the Office of German Affairs with him?

Minister Hillenbrand: Once the Berlin problem again became acute, it became a major preoccupation--if not the major preoccupation--for rather lengthy periods of time, not only of the President but of the Secretary of State and of other high officials of the Government. During this period I was, in effect, the principal working level officer dealing with the problem who had to draft papers, or was responsible at least for seeing that papers got drafted, on the subject. Our contacts were frequent; I attended practically all of the major meetings which took place in the White House on this subject over a period of several years, and I was on a number of occasions called over to the White House, in small groups, to brief the President or to obtain his decision. He obviously got to know me as an individual, and while our relationship did not become a close personal one, he was familiar with my responsibilities and my work, just as I developed a certain familiarity with his general working habits and approach to the questions with which I was dealing. I might add that, shortly after the Vienna Meeting, the organizational structure within the State Department was changed considerably to deal with the growing Berlin crisis. I was lifted out of the Office of German Affairs and made part of a special group which later developed into what became known as the Berlin Task Force. This group was originally under the direction of Assistant Secretary of

State for European Affairs Foy Kohler. I was his deputy, and when Mr. Kohler left in the summer of 1962 for Moscow to become Ambassador, I took over the direction of the Berlin Task Force. It was in this Berlin Task Force, which became the major coordinating mechanism within the United States Government at the operating level for dealing with the Berlin problem, that practically all of the paper work was done for the major conferences and meetings that took place on the Berlin and German problems over a period of some two years. The Task Force also had the action responsibility for dealing with various specific problems that arose in Berlin and elsewhere connected with Berlin--drafting of notes, contingency planning, and things of that sort.

Mr. Sweet: Did the so-called Ambassadorial Group already exist, or did that come into existence with the Task Force?

Minister Hillenbrand: It existed, but under a different name. It first came into being early in 1959, under the chairmanship of Deputy Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy. However, it met less frequently during the Eisenhower administration and on a less institutionalized basis; the secretariat functions were performed less elaborately. One might say that the heyday of the Ambassadorial Group, when it was meeting sometimes once a day and certainly several times a week, was during the period of maximum effort of the Berlin Task Force. It was the Quadripartite body in Washington which was charged, particularly after the Paris meetings of August 1961, with the coordination for the four powers of all aspects of the Berlin problem.

Mr. Sweet: As I understand it, Mr. Kohler was the United States representative on that body while he was Assistant Secretary and then when he became Ambassador, you succeeded him. Is that correct?

Minister Hillenbrand: That is generally correct. As already indicated, I was Mr. Kohler's deputy in the Berlin Task Force until he left. The Ambassadorial Group was a rather flexible body, and there were some occasions when the Secretary of State himself served as the American representative, particularly when matters of highest importance were being discussed. Mr. Kohler was normally the United States representative, and I, as his deputy, in his absence would represent the United States at meetings of this group. After Mr. Kohler left, the arrangement was that Ambassador Thompson, who had come to the Department from Moscow after Mr. Kohler had replaced him and who was appointed Ambassador at Large and a special assistant to the Secretary of State, would represent the United States when he was available and also chair the meetings. Since Washington was the locus of the meetings, the United States was always in the chair. When he was not available, I would represent the United States at these meetings.

Mr. Sweet: As Senator had Mr. Kennedy shown much preoccupation with the German problem? In other words, did he come to the presidency with a background, as far as you know, of particular interest in the German problem?

Minister Hillenbrand: I simply can't answer this question with any assurance. I would suppose that, as an intelligent member of the Senate, the President was conversant with the main aspects of the problem, but he was not involved in it in any way as a Senator which came to my attention as Director of the Office of German Affairs.

Mr. Sweet: I recall that at the time of his election there was a widespread view in Germany that he was disposed to be pro-Polish in his sympathies and perhaps somewhat anti-German. I wonder if you

CONFIDENTIAL

-7-

feel able to characterize his attitude toward Germans and the German problem at the time he took office.

Minister Hillenbrand: I think that probably would be a somewhat unfair and inaccurate description of his approach to these questions. The Germans, as might have been expected, had a somewhat questioning approach towards the new administration. After all, it was a new party which had taken over the government in the United States, and it was a party which had been associated in their minds with the wartime and immediate postwar policy of the United States towards Germany. I think President Kennedy had certain views about the nature of the German and Berlin problems. Some of the people around him seemed to think that there was some easy solution, or if not an easy solution, at least an ingenious solution, which could be devised by intelligent men, to get the Berlin problem off the President's back, and I suppose the President must have been advised by these people that such a solution was possible. One of his characteristics was that he brought to any problem an open, searching mind which was not satisfied merely to accept the conventional answers of the experts. He wanted to make sure that their answers really derived from an exhaustive analysis of the problem, and I think he was, during the early days of the administration, receptive to proposals which seemed intelligent and which seemed directed towards achieving a solution of the problem. On the other hand, I am not aware that he identified himself personally with any one of the various solutions which people in Washington were talking about as possibilities at the time. He always encouraged intellectual activity, and the circulation and exchange of ideas. It was in this stage, I think, that we found the discussion of the problem in Washington at this particular point.

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Sweet: You mentioned the fact that there were certain people around him who had these ideas about the German problem. Were they people that he had brought into the administration or were they official people, or do you feel that you wish to say something about that?

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, I think it's fair to say that some of the new ideas came with some of the new people. As you know, President Kennedy brought with him a number of academicians and also people from law firms and other areas of activity which had been associated with the Democratic Party's electoral victory. It was among these groups primarily that these ideas were circulating. This doesn't mean that everyone had a Berlin solution, but there were a number of people, highly intelligent people, who thought that they had a private answer to the Berlin problem which would help get it off the President's back. This was natural, and at the beginning of a new administration, a very healthy process, and it was to the credit of the President that his endorsement of any of these proposals was not prematurely given. In other words, the new administration was not committed to any solutions of the Berlin and German problems before a searching investigation had been made. Because of the actual development of events, as contrasted with speculation and theorizing in the early months, it soon became clear that some of these proposals had little practical relevance to real life.

Mr. Sweet: Taking the Kennedy years as a whole did you feel you observed any basic changes in the President's attitude toward the German question, toward Germans themselves?

Minister Hillenbrand: I think that the President, as he lived through the Berlin crisis and became preoccupied with it, necessarily became more and more impressed with its complexities and its difficulties. As he grew in understanding of the problem, his attitude must have

CONFIDENTIAL

-9-

changed somewhat, although as I have indicated, he had not committed himself to any specific Berlin or German solutions. As to his attitude towards the Germans, I think it was inevitable, as he met German leaders and as he was brought into contact with operational problems involving Germans, that his appraisal cease to be a general one and become specifically related to individuals, some of whom he valued highly and others of whom he valued perhaps less highly. This is a normal process through which any person coming into either a diplomatic or executive position would go. As one becomes acquainted with individuals and with problems as they deal with them, one's generalizations tend to become more particularized.

Mr. Sweet: I wonder if you'd care to comment at all on the role of the German Embassy in influencing his views on Germany and the German problem.

Minister Hillenbrand: It was quite clear that the German Embassy in Washington did not have the kind of immediate access to the White House that, say the French Embassy or the British Embassy, had. This was completely understandable. It is true that Ambassador Grewe saw the President from time to time, but I would not say that the direct impact of the German Embassy on the President, except in certain specific questions that arose and necessitated the Ambassador's personal contact with the President, was of basic significance in determining policies or judgments.

Mr. Sweet: I take it that, in the course of the Presidency, his relations with the State Department in the German question became very much more close, or is that incorrect?

Minister Hillenbrand: This I think is correct, and it was an inevitable development. The State Department, in the nature of things,

CONFIDENTIAL

had to provide the main focal point of research and coordination, and also the main source of recommendations to the President on the German and Berlin problem. The role of the Secretary of State is such that this was not only unavoidable but essential under our system of government. As the President came to know individuals in the State Department, such people as Assistant Secretary Kohler, who played a key role along with the Secretary and others, his judgment of problems and of how these problems had to be dealt with inevitably became affected by his confidence in the judgments and the knowledge and the recommendations of the individuals in the State Department with whom he was dealing on these matters. Hence, this increasingly closer relationship between the President and State Department was an entirely natural development and a healthy one. Once the President had gotten to know his advisers and had developed confidence in them, it made for easier judgments and decisions on his part. One fact about the Berlin and German problem is its tremendous complexity, both in terms of postwar development of a mass of documentation which is still relevant and in terms of actual current problems, with their many faceted aspects, which could arise at any point.

Mr. Sweet: Yes, I suppose the Berlin problem must have been the most complex problem the President dealt with in matters of foreign affairs during these years. Wouldn't you think so? Therefore, from the point of view perhaps of the future historian, it would be also interesting as a case study in how he dealt with a problem that involved the mastery of a great deal of detail. Would that be correct?

Minister Hillenbrand: I may be a prejudiced witness on this subject, but I know of no other problem in American foreign policy of recent years, or for that matter of the postwar period, that has been both as complex

as the Berlin problem and as important in terms of the possible implications if U.S. policy failed. This complexity, as I have indicated, was both a historical complexity involving a tremendous mass of documentation, precedent and past practice, and also the possibility of crises occurring in a hundred different segments of the Berlin problem: communications, transportation, access to East Berlin, etc. In addition to this, there were, in the years of the Kennedy administration, highly complicated discussions of Germany and Berlin going on with the Soviet Union, I might say the most protracted high level discussions of any subject that took place during this period.

Mr. Sweet: Would you say that the President mastered this detail to a great extent?

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, I think he mastered that which was necessary for him to master to make decisions. Obviously, in dealing with subjects of this kind of complexity, he had to rely to a great degree on advice given him by the Secretary of State and other responsible advisers, but the President had a very quick mind which went directly to essentials. He could read very rapidly, as people know, and meetings at which he was present usually did involve his knowing what the essence of the problem was. My impression is also that, in discussions with foreign statesmen including the Soviets, he knew what he wanted to say and said it well.

Mr. Sweet: The six weeks between the Bay of Pigs and the meeting with Khrushchev on June 4 must have been a critical period psychologically for the President. I wonder whether you had opportunity to observe at all how his thinking developed in the period prior to the Khrushchev meeting.

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, the Bay of Pigs was, I suppose, a traumatic experience for the new administration, but my own lack of connection with that event makes it impossible for me to comment on how specifically the President reacted to it, other than in terms of what I have read in books and newspapers. On the other hand, I do think it is fair to say that none of us knew--certainly the President didn't know either--what to expect from Khrushchev at the Vienna meeting. Some people thought at the time that the Bay of Pigs would inevitably have an effect on Khrushchev's estimate of the President and of the new administration, and might make him tougher in the forthcoming confrontation than he might otherwise have been inclined to be. In the light of hindsight, I think this was probably a correct appraisal of the effect of the Bay of Pigs on Khrushchev. I don't know what the President, in his innermost thoughts, expected he would be able to do with Khrushchev at Vienna. In the briefing materials which were prepared for the Vienna meeting, we certainly didn't try to hold out the hope of any easy solution to the Berlin problem. The recommendations made to the President, which were approved by the Secretary of State, were that he should state the American position on the Berlin question in unequivocal terms and make clear that a vital interest of the United States was involved in the maintenance of our position there. This general approach was one which the President accepted and, I believe, carried out in his Vienna talks.

Mr. Sweet: I suppose, after the Vienna talks and until his speech of July 25, there must have been a period of very active thought in Washington. Do you have any comments you would care to make on that period?

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, it was a period of more than active thought. It was also a period, as I recall it, of rather hectic work. It was quite clear that the blunt way in which Khrushchev presented the President with the Soviet position on Berlin, which led the President to make his remark about the likelihood of a cold winter, had created the prospect of a major crisis. As you will recall, Khrushchev presented the President, in effect, with a year-end deadline. Here again, I don't think I'm capable of speaking of the internal thought processes of the President, but it seems clear that he emerged from the Vienna meeting with Khrushchev feeling that a major confrontation with the Soviet Union was about to take place and that the energies of the new administration had to be devoted, on an emergency basis, to meeting this challenge to our position.

One result was that the Secretary of State was charged with coordinating the work in the U.S. government of formulating recommendations to the President as to the courses of action which should now be followed. A body which, as I recall, was named the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group, was established under the general direction of the Secretary of State. This was the forerunner of the Berlin Task Force, and it worked in close collaboration with the White House, and particularly with Mr. McGeorge Bundy who was charged by the President with maintaining close liaison with the State Department. There was an initial meeting, as I remember, of the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group in which the Secretary made a statement on behalf of the President. A number of us were brought up to the seventh floor of the State Department, having been pulled out of our normal bureau operations in order to staff this Interdepartmental Coordinating Group. We were charged initially with the coordination of a report to be made to the President within a

very tight deadline, I think it was about ten days, which was to make comprehensive recommendations as to what should be done. This involved working almost around the clock, because it quickly became clear, both in terms of the expectancies of the White House and of the exigencies of the situation itself, that the report had both to be comprehensive and to come up with recommendations which would involve highly important policy decisions on the President's part. The deadline for the first of these reports was, I believe, July 12, 1961. This report, which was a rather mammoth document, was discussed at a high level meeting at the White House at which I was present.

Mr. Sweet: That was before the speech?

Minister Hillenbrand: This was all before the speech. The speech took place on July 25th; this meeting was on the 12th of July. The meeting took place at the White House under the President's chairmanship. While the report, it was generally felt by the President as well as by the other high officials present, represented a very good job and pulled together a tremendous amount of material, further working out was required before the President could actually take the decisions which were suggested by the report. So the same group was charged with the preparation of a supplementary report on an even tighter deadline. The supplementary report, as I remember, had to be ready by the 18th of July. This necessitated another around-the-clock week, or less than a week, of work. The resulting report was then discussed at a White House meeting about the 19th of July. This, of course, was the meeting out of which came the decisions which were reflected in the President's famous speech of the 25th of July, 1961. This laid out the basic U.S. policy on Germany and Berlin in the light of the Vienna meeting.

Mr. Sweet: I note that you together with Messrs. Rusk, McNamara and Acheson met with the President the day after the speech. Do you recall anything about that meeting?

Minister Hillenbrand: As I recall, this meeting was devoted to a discussion of the next steps to be taken. Mr. Acheson, who was not a formal member of the new administration, had already, prior to this time, served as an adviser on a number of ad hoc assignments which the President had asked him to undertake. He was asked by the President to come into the discussion of the Berlin situation in the United States government, and to add his advice to that obtained from the State Department and other Departments of the government. A big problem at this time, I might mention, was what the United States should do in response to the Vienna threats in terms of specific action in the military area. It was quite clear that, apart from political and other responses, some military response by the United States would be appropriate. I do not mean forceful military action but some kind of a military buildup, which would be ordained to the year-end deadline stipulated by Chairman Khrushchev. In addition to this, there was a question of relating this military buildup to political actions to be taken simultaneously by the United States to impress upon the Soviet Union the seriousness with which the United States government regarded the Berlin problem, so as to get the maximum results from the military buildup. This meeting, as I recall, discussed, inter alia, former Secretary of State Acheson's analysis of the problem. ~~The decision was made to build up the military buildup, which was made by the President later in August after inter-Ally meetings in Paris.~~

Mr. Sweet: Incidentally, what kind of records were kept of such meetings with the President?

Minister Hillenbrand: There was no formal keeping of records, as I recall. In other words, there were no detailed or systematic minutes kept--no verbatim or anything of that sort. Some of these meetings were either meetings of the National Security Council, or of a segment of the National Security Council, and the decisions taken were then reflected in what were called National Security Council action memoranda. These were normally prepared by McGeorge Bundy. They were generally circulated to those who had been present--or at least some of the participants--before being issued in final form. However, since there was no system of keeping a detailed record of these meetings, as I have indicated, much of what was said at them is preserved only in the memories of those who participated.

Mr. Sweet: Approximately three weeks elapsed between the President's July 25th speech and the erection of the Berlin Wall. I see no record of your meeting with the President during that period after the meeting on July 26th. Do you recall whether you saw him during that period?

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, that's fairly easy to explain. One reason there was no White House meeting was that most of the American officials responsible for the Berlin problem were physically absent from the country. One of the results of the second of these reports which I mentioned was that the President accepted its recommendation that the U.S. proposals on a military buildup and on a concomitant political program should be presented to our NATO Allies. A special working group, on which Mr. Kohler was the American representative and I was his deputy, met in Paris with German, French and British officials to prepare for a four-power Foreign Ministers' meeting scheduled to take

place in Paris in early August. This was to be followed by a general NATO Ministerial meeting, at which the proposals of the Four were to be presented to all of the NATO countries for their approval. Hence the last part of July and the early part of August was a period of what is known as frenzied diplomatic activity, but it took place in Paris rather than in the United States. This was why none of us was present at any meetings in the White House, although it was quite clear that the President kept in very close touch with what was going on in Paris. We filed long reports every day from Paris, and got almost daily instructions from Washington on the positions which we were to take.

Mr. Sweet: Did the Wall come as an entire surprise then?

Minister Hillenbrand: "Entire surprise" is perhaps the wrong expression. It certainly came as a surprise in specific terms. It had become clear to many of us who were dealing with the Berlin problem that the East German regime and the Soviet Union would have to do something, somehow about the ever-increasing flow of refugees, which was reaching almost run-away proportions by mid-summer of 1961. The constant refugee drain had been a major factor in hampering the growth of the GDR. It had continued at impressive rates over a period of ten years or more, and had resulted in an actual diminution of the population of the GDR. Then, during the summer of 1961, what became known as "Torschlusspanik" or panic in anticipation of the door slamming shut, took over in the GDR, a psychological phenomenon which made many people decide to leave right away rather than wait a little longer. This led to an explosive outpouring of refugees from the GDR which, over one weekend, I believe, reached nearly 50,000.

Under these conditions it was clear that the East Germans would have to do something, if their entire state was not to melt away

demographically. We had always assumed that perhaps the most logical way for them to try to control the situation would be to place very rigid barriers against individual movement at the boundary between East Germany and East Berlin. Well, they didn't do that. They chose the method of the Wall. I don't know of anyone who anticipated that they would do precisely what they did in that particular way. I remember seeing no intelligence reports or any other materials which predicted the building of the Wall. It may be that there were some of this kind, but I doubt it. They would most probably have come to my attention, so I think it is an accurate statement to say that the Wall as a wall came as a surprise, but it did not come as a surprise that measures were taken drastically to reduce the flow of refugees.

Mr. Sweet: How did the Presidency function in the Wall crisis? I don't know whether that's a fair question or not.

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, it's a fair question, but it's not one that I can answer very well personally, because I was sitting on an island off the coast of Georgia on August 13. After returning from the meetings in Paris, with the permission of my superiors, I had hopefully embarked on ten days of leave. We had had a pretty rugged six weeks before that. I didn't even know about the Wall until the day after it happened. What happened thereafter, of course, was that within a few days I received urgent telephone calls from the State Department which brought me back to Washington, curtailing my leave, but I was not there on August 13 or for the immediate aftermath.

Mr. Sweet: Do you recall what day you returned?

Minister Hillenbrand: I don't remember the exact day, but it must have been about the 17th or 18th of August.

Mr. Sweet: Do you know whether serious consideration was given

at the time to knocking down the Wall, by the President?

Minister Hillenbrand: This was obviously one of the theoretical possibilities, but I cannot speak from personal knowledge of any specific discussions of this possibility, or of other possible reactions, which took place in the White House immediately after August 13. It is quite clear anyway that this course of action was rejected. I think the underlying reason for rejecting this possibility was that it didn't seem to constitute a really effective reaction. Apart from the fact that it would have involved moving into an area which was not under our physical control, and might have necessitated the continued use of force, it would not have prevented construction of a further wall slightly to the rear. In effect, what you had was the theoretical possibility of having to make numerous incursions to break down numerous barriers, which would have been an ultimately futile process. While there have been many criticisms, of course, of the failure of the Allies to take decisive action to knock down the Wall, I think most people who were aware of the realities of life in Berlin at that particular time do not feel that such an action would probably have been effective. I recall that General Clay, who certainly is not known for his reticence in pursuing activist policies, himself admitted as much in a television broadcast which I heard. He, in effect, defended the response of the Allies to the Wall.

Mr. Sweet: Was the German government particularly active in this period in pressing or presenting its views to the President?

Minister Hillenbrand: Do you mean on the Wall?

Mr. Sweet: On the Wall and on related subjects.

Minister Hillenbrand: Well the German government was, of course, involved in the Quadripartite meetings on the subject. By this time the Ambassadorial Group was beginning to meet regularly in Washington.

On the other hand, to my knowledge, the German Government never proposed that physical action be taken to remove the Wall.

Mr. Sweet: By September 14 when the Soviets announced that Gromyko was prepared to have direct exchanges of views with Secretary Rusk there seemed to be some easing of the crisis, and the President himself subsequently met with Gromyko on October 6 and I believe that this initiated a long, long period of talks at various levels with the Russians on Berlin. Is that not correct?

Minister Hillenbrand: That's substantially correct. Judgments may vary as to how much, by this point, the Berlin crisis had actually eased. There had been no withdrawal yet of the year-end deadline of the Soviets, and the American military buildup was just being launched. The theory of the administration, and I think it was a sound one, was that, while we must take these military measures, and must by concomitant political action impress the Soviets with the seriousness with which we regarded their threats to our position in Berlin, at the same time we must engage them in discussions aimed at seeing whether there was not some diplomatic way out of the impasse. It was quite clear -- the expression was frequently used at this time -- that we were on a collision course with the Soviets, and that, if they carried out their year-end threat to go ahead and sign a peace treaty with the East Germans, and thereby, as they claimed, to turn over all responsibilities for Allied access to the East Germans, we were going to be in a first-class crisis with all the possible implications of such a crisis in a military sense. It was for this reason that the President actively favored pursuing the problem with the Soviets diplomatically. An occasion for doing this was provided, of course, by Gromyko's coming to New York in connection with the session of the General Assembly which opened in September, 1961.

Mr. Sweet: Yes, in speaking of the easing of the crisis I meant simply that there had been an agreement to talk, and I wonder whether

at this period the President had fairly defined ideas about what should be sought in talks with the Russians.

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, as you know, these talks were conducted initially by the Secretary of State with Mr. Gromyko. They were designated not as negotiations but as exploratory talks to ascertain whether a basis for negotiations existed. This formula was developed because it had proved impossible to obtain French concurrence to the opening of more formal discussions with the Soviets. The French refused to participate in any Four-power meetings with the Soviets, but they did say they would not object to the conduct by the Secretary of these exploratory talks. So the Secretary, going into these talks, was in no position to make commitments for the occupation powers in Berlin. His object was merely to probe and to find out whether there was any basis at all for thinking that a more formal type of meeting with the Soviets could lead to a resolution of the problem which might be acceptable to the Western powers.

Mr. Sweet: This is a matter simply of establishing facts for the chronology, but did the Russians ever formally announce that they had withdrawn the year-end deadline? Or was it simply allowed to lapse?

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, formal announcements or releases, as you know, are not something to which the Russians are prone, but this was not the first deadline which was passed without major happening. I don't recall exactly how the Russians rescinded this one, but I think that they let it be known, during the fall, that because discussions were going on between the Secretary and the President and Foreign Minister Gromyko, the year-end deadline would be deferred in the hope that some resolution of the problem could be reached.

Mr. Sweet: At the time of the deadline, instead of following through on their threat, the Russians instead sent their memorandum of December 27 to the Germans which seemed to be a bid for the possibility of bilateral approach with the Germans. Is that correct?

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, I would put that in the category of muddying the waters. The December 27 memorandum did not play a particularly significant role in terms of the actual development of the Berlin crisis.

Mr. Sweet: Was the President himself interested in it at all?

Minister Hillenbrand: Oh yes, he was during this period intensely interested in anything that had to do with the German problem or the Berlin problem. The December 27 memorandum obviously led to the request by the White House for a briefing on the memorandum and its implications for us. This was done, I think, in a paper prepared on the subject, but, as I said, it became clear from the contents of the memorandum that it didn't make any real contribution to a solution of the German or Berlin problems, because it was largely a restatement of the traditional Soviet position.

Mr. Sweet: I notice that the frequency of your meetings with the President increased a good deal at the beginning of 1962 during the first phase of the Thompson soundings in Moscow. From January 2nd to April 16th you are recorded as being with the President five times, and one of these was an off-the-record Berlin session on March 7th, 1962, with Vice President Johnson present and numerous other very high officials. I wonder if you would care to summarize what this activity was focused on at that time.

Minister Hillenbrand: After the departure of Foreign Minister Gromyko from the United States, it was clear that a further round of discussions with the Soviets would have to take place--still in the category

of so-called exploratory talks. It was decided that it would be best to conduct these in Moscow between Gromyko and our Ambassador in Moscow, Llewellyn Thompson. This, of course, presented certain operational problems, because it meant that very detailed instructions had to be drafted before each meeting in Moscow and approved by the U.S. Government. This meant, in effect, approval by the President personally, before despatch to Thompson for his use in each meeting. The original drafting of these instructions was done in the Berlin Task Force. They were then approved by the Secretary of State and cleared with the President at meetings in the White House. Many of the meetings to which you refer were in connection with the discussion and the final approval of these instructions, which were then sent telegraphically to Ambassador Thompson.

Mr. Sweet: Did the President himself get involved in the drafting and revisions? Did he ever take pen in hand?

Minister Hillenbrand: Oh yes. He very often did. He had a sense of prose style and also ideas about what he wanted said. He would write these directly into the draft or at least, at meetings, say how he wanted them expressed. We would have to make note of his remarks, and incorporate his wishes in the draft that went out. I might add that, after each meeting in Moscow, Ambassador Thompson sent long reports back to Washington which had to be analyzed and used in the preparation of the instructions for the following round. I might also add that the March meeting to which you referred was not, as I recall it, in connection with the Moscow talks but in preparation for the meetings which the Secretary of State was scheduled to have with Foreign Minister Gromyko in Geneva. The occasion for these meetings in Geneva was not specifically discussion of Berlin but rather the fact that the cycle of disarmament negotiations had reached a point where it was decided that the Foreign Ministers should meet. Of course, it was recognized immediately that this would provide a very good

opportunity for side talks on Berlin with Foreign Minister Gromyko. In practice, both Gromyko and the Secretary of State devoted much more time to the discussion of the Berlin question than they did to the discussion of disarmament during this period in Geneva.

Mr. Sweet: Why did the Germans get so excited at this period; or is that an overstatement?

Minister Hillenbrand: I think it's perhaps an accurate statement, but perhaps a little ahead of events. In these exploratory talks we had, of course, been coordinating with our Allies including the Germans. I might add this added to the complexity of getting instructions out to Ambassador Thompson. We had tried to keep our Allies fully informed, using the mechanism of the Ambassadorial Group for this purpose. In the exploratory talks the Secretary had developed certain positions which he had put forward on a tentative basis to the Soviets. At the same time the Four-Power mechanism had been grinding out ideas and papers, such as the proposal for an international access authority to Berlin. When these were used, they were not put to the Soviets as governmental proposals, but within the framework of these so-called exploratory talks merely to probe, to find out whether there was any basis for thinking that an agreement could be reached.

It seems that Chancellor Adenauer, who had apparently not been following the discussions with the same care as the President, suddenly became aware of this proposal for an International Access Authority as well as of certain other things, and did not like them. The method was then resorted to, which had been tried before in Bonn, of calculated leaks to the press. This created the kind of synthetic crisis, which we have seen in Bonn from time to time. The interest of the politicians was stimulated, and tended to feed on itself, so that you did have within the spring period what became known as the "leaks crisis", or the International Access Authority crisis, or whatever you may wish to call it. There was

a rather intense discussion in Bonn, accompanied by a great deal of criticism of the United States, which from our point of view was obviously no contribution towards the conduct of the exploratory talks.

Mr. Sweet: Did you ever hear the President express himself on these matters of the press leaks?

Minister Hillenbrand: Well, I think it was quite clear that Washington reacted with a certain amount of irritation to what seemed like a deliberate campaign to make more difficult what was already an exceedingly difficult and delicate diplomatic operation. Those representing the U.S. felt that they had insured that German interests, as well as the interests of their other Allies, were fully safeguarded. The U.S. side had made no significant concessions, and at the same time was dealing with a potentially highly explosive situation in which the U.S., as the major nuclear power in the West, would inevitably have to bear the heaviest responsibility and burden. I think the President felt that calculated leaks and stimulated criticism of the U.S. government of a rather frenetic nature, such as characterized Bonn during this period, was not really a very helpful contribution.

Mr. Sweet: Did the German Embassy in Washington come under suspicion of leaking too?

Minister Hillenbrand: I think there was a feeling, on the part of some, that the reporting by the German Embassy of the quadripartite discussions in Washington tended to emphasize negative features more than the facts warranted, and particularly seemed to read certain implications into American intentions which were not warranted by the facts. However, since we weren't reading their telegrams, there was no sure basis for knowing this, although I think the supposition was not entirely unrealistic. On the other hand, the four-power meetings continued in Washington, and the souring of the atmosphere which inevitably took place because of the

leaks crisis did not have any basic effect upon our willingness to share information and to ask advice within the Ambassadorial Group.

Mr. Sweet: In April, May and July there were talks then between Mr. Rusk and Dobrynin which culminated in a meeting between Mr. Kennedy and Dobrynin on July 17, and I see that you were twice with the President in the week before he saw Dobrynin. I wonder if you recall anything of what seemed to be chiefly on the President's mind in connection with the talks.

Minister Hillenbrand: These talks with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin in Washington were a continuation of the exploratory talks which that year had run through the Thompson-Gromyko phase in Moscow and then the Rusk-Gromyko talks in Geneva in March. The exchanges were resumed with Dobrynin, the new Soviet Ambassador who came here with a reputation of being a much better man than his predecessor. It was felt that, at a certain point, it might be well to bring in the President to these talks with Dobrynin, and the meetings to which you refer were in preparation for his discussion with Dobrynin. The method used for briefing our principals for these meetings in Washington was obviously somewhat different from when the discussions were going on in Moscow. Long telegrams were no longer required, and the important paper was a so-called talking points paper which was prepared either for the Secretary, for those meetings in which he was the principal participant, or for the President when he was the principal U.S. participant. These meetings in the White House were in connection with the formulation of a final version of the talking points paper. Obviously all other aspects of the Berlin Problem were discussed that were pertinent at the time.

I might reiterate that Berlin, as I have indicated, is a very complicated situation. While talks were proceeding, much else was happening relevant to Berlin. For example, in March 1962, we had major harrassments in the air corridors going on simultaneously with the Rusk-Gromyko talks in

Geneva. In fact it was probably because of the intervention of the Secretary with Gromyko on this subject that the air corridor crisis was finally brought to an end. While I can't, without having some sort of a detailed chronology, correlate individual talks with individual events, it is certain that there were other major threats or harassments going on at Berlin at points along the way, which also had to be discussed in the White House along with the preparation for the discussions with Dobrynin. As a matter of fact, generally speaking, meetings at the White House did not limit themselves to just one subject. There were usually several other related problems that had to be discussed at the same time. The quadripartite mechanism and the Berlin Task Force was always bringing up questions arising out of specific harassments, or threats of harassments, that had to be referred to the President for decision, so that over this period he was constantly involved, not only in these so-called exploratory talks, but also in a large number of decisions about how we would respond to harassment and how we would formulate the U.S. position in elaborating the very complicated body of contingency plans which were being worked out by the quadripartite mechanism, and also, to some extent, by our NATO Allies in the NATO Council in Paris.

Mr. Sweet: These briefing papers you mentioned for the President-- did he like them to be very detailed? For example, on the Berlin matter, did a fairly short summary generally suffice?

Minister Hillenbrand: That would vary with the subject to be covered. I think it fair to say that the President did not shirk reading lengthier papers if that were required for understanding of the subject. Obviously, to him as a very busy man, if the subject could be compressed and dealt with in short space, so much the better. He also, of course, relied to some degree upon oral amplifications of written materials. He had a very decided gift for going directly to the essentials of a problem. He relied

also, to a considerable extent, on Mr. Bundy to brief him on matters which Mr. Bundy had more time to read into in detail.

Mr. Sweet: As for his methods of work, would you say he was an easy person to deal with in this kind of matter or how would you describe that, generally speaking? Was the atmosphere generally relaxed, or could it be tense?

Minister Hillenbrand: I think the atmosphere was generally a very healthy and relatively relaxed one. Obviously, the problems were of a kind that didn't permit too much relaxation, and the President was always cognizant of their basic seriousness. On the other hand, he always gave the impression of being in full command of the situation and of not being overwhelmed by the complexities or by the gravity of the decisions that he was being asked to make. His working style was a fairly easy and generally affable one. As I said earlier, meetings in the White House were not formal, in the sense that they resulted in a lot of documentation, elaborate minutes, and so on. This was not an institutionalized form of decision-making. The President, in effect, picked the brains of those who were there, asked for their advice, and then arrived at his decisions.

Mr. Sweet: I note that your meetings with the President became still more frequent after Mr. Kohler went to Moscow. I suppose that was because of your added responsibilities in the Ambassadorial Group.

Minister Hillenbrand: Well it was partly that, I suppose. It was also partly that, in the late summer and fall of 1962, we were again going into a very active period. First there was another intensive series of discussions with Foreign Minister Gromyko, who once again had come to the General Assembly session in New York. It had been decided that the Secretary of State would have a number of meetings with him. Also, because we soon got into the Cuban situation, I was involved very closely in the discussions in the White House, because it was not known whether

or not the Soviets would react to what was happening in and about Cuba by putting the heat on us in Berlin. For this reason, the President, the Secretary and other officials were very concerned that our Berlin contingency planning and that our preparedness to react should be at maximum readiness.

Mr. Sweet: I see that, from the beginning of August until October 22, the date of the Cuban confrontation you were at eleven meetings in the White House including two on October 22 itself. I wonder if you would wish to comment on the effect of the Cuban confrontation on the Berlin and German discussions.

Minister Hillenbrand: Of course, we didn't know what was going to happen at the time. We were prepared for a fairly severe Soviet reaction on the Berlin access routes, recommendations were made to the President which could have provided the basis for his decisions had they been necessary. Obviously, here again we would have had to consult with our Allies, since we were not in exclusive occupation in Berlin. Now in the light of hindsight it is fairly clear, I think, that the Cuban crisis marked a watershed in the Berlin crisis, and that one of the effects of the Cuban experience as far as the Soviets were concerned was that they now knew that the U.S. was prepared to interpose its nuclear deterrent in a way which could raise the element of risk for the Soviets to such a degree that they could not afford, in terms of their own rational evaluation of the situation, to put us under heavy pressure in other sensitive areas such as Berlin. Now we can't know exactly how, in a very complicated situation, the Soviet line of reasoning ran or what the basic motives of the Soviet leadership were, but it does seem quite clear now that, once the Cuban crisis was over and its implications had sunk in, the Berlin situation gradually ceased to play a primary role in Soviet thinking. The Soviets, in effect, did what we used to describe as putting the Berlin problem on the back burner. Given the rather insoluble nature of the Berlin problem in terms of arriving at a formalized agreement

with the Soviets, this was one of the outcomes which some of us had envisaged as perhaps the best that could be obtained under the circumstances.

Mr. Sweet: Yes, one has the impression just from looking at the public record at least that the center of attention shifted to things like the discussions over the Test Ban Treaty possibility and such things as that, already in the beginning of 1963. Then at the turn of the year the Germans and French were negotiating about their Franco-German Treaty. I wonder if you have any comments to make on how the President reacted to that.

Minister Hillenbrand: Here you get into an area with which I was not dealing directly at the time. While it is true that, in January of 1963, we didn't yet definitely know that the Berlin crisis was on the back burner as far as the Soviets were concerned, the degree of harassment of our position in Berlin had diminished very markedly and there were no major problems involving Berlin up for decision. If you look at the calendar of the President you will see that, at this point, my meetings with him in the White House became much more infrequent and thereafter were largely connected with visits of prominent Germans rather than with the handling of specific problems. Therefore, in specific response to your question, I really don't have anything to add about how the President reacted to the Franco-German Treaty other than what is generally already known.

Mr. Sweet: I wonder if you would care to comment at all on the President's attitude towards some of the specific German leaders of his period, as for example, Chancellor Adenauer.

Minister Hillenbrand: This gets into a rather delicate area, and it is perhaps somewhat presumptuous to attempt to assess how individuals react to each other. We can't, after all, see into their minds, and there

is always an area of privacy here. I think it is fair to say, however, that there was a certain problem of age difference between President Kennedy, who was really several generations apart, and Chancellor Adenauer. Chancellor Adenauer had always emphasized his very close relationship with former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. While he got along well with President Eisenhower, it was obvious that his primary relationship, the one which he really cherished during the Eisenhower administration, was that with Secretary of State Dulles. I believe that one can say that the relationship which developed between Chancellor Adenauer and President Kennedy was never one of great warmth but one of a certain amount of mutual respect, a relationship which permitted the conduct of that business which had to be done at that particular level. I won't go here into the theory of summitry and under what conditions meetings of heads of governments are likely to be most fruitful. The fact is that Chancellor Adenauer, fairly early in the Kennedy administration, felt that he must establish personal contact with the President and he made his first visit then, as I recall, in April of 1961. There were several other visits during the course of the next couple of years, all of which went off more or less well. There were certainly no major personal difficulties. The President, in those visits to Washington, with his facility at turning a phrase and his gift for being a fine host, tended to override the real difficulties which might have arisen. Despite the leaks problem, that I have mentioned, or other misunderstandings, these visits, in immediate retrospect, generally seemed to be fairly successful and always well tempered. I don't know whether you planned to ask me anything about the trip of the President to Germany in June of 1963. That was really such a trip sui generis that it deserves separate treatment.

Mr. Sweet: Do you want to comment on it at this point?

Minister Hillenbrand: As visits of heads of government go, this was

a major personal triumph for President Kennedy of a kind which left a deep impression on the German people and I think, left a correspondingly deep impression on the President himself.

Mr. Sweet: You were already here in Bonn at the time of that meeting?

Minister Hillenbrand: That's right. I had arrived here in Bonn several weeks before the visit took place and was no longer in the State Department. I was involved in the preparations for the visit before leaving Washington, and then got very much caught up here in the final preparations for the visit at this end. Much has been written about this visit, and there is no point in going over what is already well known, but I do think that, in a sense, the visit did mark a peak in the development of President Kennedy's attitude towards the Germans and towards the German government. Had he lived, I believe that it would have had a continuing influence in his approach towards questions involving the Germans.

Mr. Sweet: I was always greatly impressed by the accessibility of the President to visiting Germans. Often he seemed to receive not only ^{the} very prominent but Bundestag deputies sometimes not even from the top drawer. Did that mean that he was at particular pains to be on a personal basis with representative Germans? How would you describe that?

Minister Hillenbrand: I think the President recognized very early in his administration that it was important to make himself available to those visitors from Germany who had any justifiable call on his time at all. In this respect he was very gracious in accepting the recommendations of the Office of German Affairs and the Berlin Task Force, which also saw a decided advantage, particularly under the crisis conditions that existed, in having as many Germans as possible obtain at first hand an authoritative statement of the American position from the President. He did this very capably and with eloquence. We felt this was a very useful educational process, and I believe the President recognized that he had a very important educational role to play in these meetings.

CONFIDENTIAL

-33-

There was, of course, an additional factor. Because of the post-war history of our relations with Germany, dating back to the occupation and High Commission periods, the Germans, perhaps more than any other people, have expected of their leaders that it be a part of any trip to the United States that they drop in at Washington and see a maximum number of American officials as high up the line as they can get. There is no doubt but that it is a feather in the cap of any individual German politician, a political asset in his own country, if he can get into the White House and see the President. This became almost a competitive matter, and was not without some ludicrous aspects. I can recall the stories that were going the round in Bonn and in Washington Embassy circles that so-and-so had spent twenty-seven minutes with the President. Then his political rival would arrive in Washington, perhaps five weeks later. He was proud to be able to say that he had spent thirty-three minutes with the President, but neglected to say that eight minutes of that time had been spent in the men's room on the way out. In any case, I think it's fair to say that while these conversations with visiting Germans may have been a difficult exaction of time from the President's very busy schedule, in practically every case it paid very large dividends in terms of affecting the attitudes of the German officials involved.

Mr. Sweet: Was he on a personal basis with any Germans? I mean, did he have any German friends who had entree to him just because he knew them and liked them?

Minister Hillenbrand: I believe there was no one who would literally fall in that category. It is fair to say that the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt, came as close to it as anyone else. He had the kind of personality, and represented the kind of viewpoint, which the President found particularly congenial. There was therefore never any question, when Willy Brandt was in the United States, whether the President would be happy to see him. Little persuasion by the State Department was required.

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Sweet: Did they know each other before he became President, so far as you know?

Minister Hillenbrand: So far as I know, they did not. I don't say this with complete assurance, however, but I have no information which would indicate that they had known each other before.

Mr. Sweet: How active was the German Embassy in promoting these kinds of contacts?

Minister Hillenbrand: The German Embassy was obviously very happy to be able to get a leading German politician in to see the President. I am sure they did not hesitate to indicate to the interested party that they had made certain efforts in order to achieve this. This is part of the bread and butter of any diplomatic establishment, German or American. Actually the Embassy also relied very heavily on the intercession of the State Department to obtain appointments for many German politicians who might not have automatically gotten into the White House, purely on the basis of an approach by the Embassy. In any event, in order to preserve orderly procedures, we encouraged having approaches made to the White House through the State Department rather than having the Embassy going directly to the White House for appointments.

Mr. Sweet: Taking the Kennedy years as a whole, would you say that the President had a German policy within a larger context, or just how would you appraise it in those terms? Or was it pretty much because of the circumstances an ad hoc meeting of crisis situations?

Minister Hillenbrand: I suppose it is fair to say that policy is always to some degree a function of events. One does not come into office with a full-blown policy whether it relate to Germany or France or any other country. Generalized policy, the kind of policy that you find in country papers, is seldom a very useful guide to action except in the most generalized terms. The kinds of policies with respect to Germany that were developed during the Kennedy period were frequently developed in direct reaction to

an immediate need, but the implications of policies were also frequently much broader than the kinds of situations which had elicited the policies. I think it is quite clear that the President's strong emphasis on our position in Berlin would not have been necessary if the Berlin situation had been relatively dormant, such as it was in the period 1952 to 1958. You always tend to formulate with more precision what your policy is when you are under heavy pressure, and have to write a lot of notes, go to a lot of conferences, and so on. This is in the very nature of things. I think that the President's formulations of our basic policies in some of his most noted speeches, such as the July 25, 1961 speech, obviously would not have taken place if it had not been for the fact that this was part of our response to the Vienna meeting.

Mr. Sweet: To what degree would you say the approach of the President to the Berlin problem was affected by the fact that the nuclear stalemate existed during his term?

Minister Hillenbrand: From the beginning of his administration President Kennedy was very much conscious of the responsibility which he, as President of the United States, had for the use of our nuclear deterrent in any given crisis situation. I believe he brought to this awesome responsibility a strong sense of conscience and a strong sense of the implications for the American people of the possible use of nuclear weapons. Yet I think he was also very conscious of the fact that, our possession of those nuclear weapons and our ability to make the Soviet Union believe that, under certain circumstances, we might be forced to use them, constituted our basic security and our ability to withstand Soviet threats and pressures in a situation, particularly like Berlin, where we were at an admitted geographical disadvantage and where the Soviets could bring to bear their undoubted superior local forces in any showdown. As it would have to any man of conscience in such a situation, I think the President inevitably tended to

look at problems not only in terms of their immediate resolution but in terms of the long range implications they might have in tending to bring about a nuclear confrontation. In the Cuban situation he showed that, under circumstances which he considered sufficiently vital to the security of the United States, he was prepared to employ the potential of those nuclear weapons to achieve important objectives.

However, he was certainly not a rash man who would plunge into a situation waving our nuclear bombs and implying that we were prepared to inject the nuclear equation immediately. It was one of the unique things about the Berlin situation that it did, both in popular belief, in press treatment, and I think in the estimates of the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States, raise the nuclear factor much earlier than many other situations which actually involved more physical violence on the spot. This was, of course, partly due to the fact that, in and about Berlin, there was a direct confrontation between the military forces of the United States and the Soviet Union. Moreover, both countries had, in effect, declared that their vital interests were involved in the situation. This created a tense atmosphere about every discussion of the Berlin problem, which was reflected in the rather spectacular treatment which it always got in the press, in the fact that even minor incidents in Berlin were blown up immediately into front page stories.

I think that the President recognized, after his Vienna confrontation with Khrushchev, that there were two aspects to the military might of the United States. There was, first of all, the basic willingness, which was a question of determination and will, to employ the nuclear weapon under certain extreme contingencies--contingencies that we would never seek ourselves and that we would certainly wish, purely in terms of our own national self-interest, to avoid if at all possible. The second aspect about our military strength was the fact that, in an out-and-out arms race, a competition for general increase of military capacity, the United States, out of its vast economic abundance, with an economy that was not operating

with the same kind of strained distorted imbalance as that of the Soviet Union, could easily divert a portion of its resources from civilian use into a larger arms program. This could be done without any real disruption of our economy, whereas for the Soviet Union any further diversion of resources to military use would cause a further unbalancing of an already delicate economic structure. This was part of the underlying reasoning that went into the U.S. military buildup in 1961, which was supposed to have both a direct and an indirect deterrent effect. The direct deterrent effect was that the military buildup, and particularly the augmentation of our forces in Germany, was intended to impress the Soviet Union with the seriousness of our intentions. The Soviets could see that we were building up our forces there and obviously not just for fun. The second effect was to foreshadow the possibility of even more comprehensive military buildup, a military buildup which, I have indicated, was something the Soviet Union could not hope to emulate. While we cannot obviously know with any certainty, the unwillingness of Khrushchev, in terms of his own recognition of the limitations of the Soviet economy, to engage us in an arms race, to create a kind of continuing crisis which could only result in the multiplication of American armament efforts, probably played a role in that tempering of the Berlin crisis that came about in the latter part of 1961. It may also have led eventually to his Cuban venture, but this is purely speculation. We have no way of knowing this with any certainty.

So coming back to the original question, I think it is fair to say that the President's employment of our nuclear capacity as a diplomatic weapon in the Berlin situation was a very measured and tempered one, one which reflected his full comprehension of the awesome implications of the nuclear weapon and of his responsibilities as President. It also involved a courageous recognition of the fact that we had to make it credible to the Soviets that, if we were pushed beyond a certain point affecting our national security

and vital interests, the danger of the use of those weapons might arise in a highly critical way. I think that, by achieving this credibility, he was able to add to the general Western deterrence of the Soviets in Berlin which, in the light of retrospect, we can certainly say was a successful effort.

Mr. Sweet: You referred to the fact that the President was not a rash man. What was his characteristic approach to problems? Was it considered, measured or was he at times disposed to quick decisions without perhaps a great deal of reflection?

Minister Hillenbrand: He did not normally resort to snap judgments about either the nature of a situation or about the remedies that were required. He was a man, I think, of a certain amount of psychological insight, not only into his own advisers but also, to a certain degree, into the minds of his opponents, including his Soviet opponents. I don't know how conscious this process was, but I did have the impression, on many occasions, that the President was thinking of how--assuming that psychologically they were men like we--the Soviets might react in a given situation to what they might interpret as unduly provocative or unduly challenging action on our part. I think he sometimes concluded that certain actions which were proposed by some of his advisers were inadvisable simply because they could only have an irritating and an exacerbating effect on the Soviets without really contributing to that basic amelioration of the situation in which alone a resolution of the Berlin problem could be found.

Apart from this psychological insight which made the President, in my judgment, largely correct in his appraisal of probable Soviet reactions to specific things we were doing or proposing to do, the President was also very much against what might be called empty gestures--gestures merely for the effect they might have on certain segments of the American public, or on certain segments of the press, but which

would have no real effect on the situation nor even be likely to impress the Soviets. As a realist the President was very conscious of the physical limitations of our position in Berlin. He was not among those who suffered from the illusion, which some people apparently did, that in all of the extensive discussions and negotiations about Berlin which went on during his administration we were actually negotiating from a position of basic strength. I think he recognized that, realistically regarded, our position in Berlin was geographically weak. Legally it was good, although perhaps not quite as good as we might have wished in every respect, because of the obscurity of some of the postwar agreements with the Soviets, but still legally a good case could be made for our position. Morally, of course, we thought our position was irreproachable. Basically we could only counteract the geographical weaknesses of our position in Berlin, which exposed us to a wide variety of harassments, by determination, by the threat of doing something not directly in Berlin but elsewhere--what might be called indirect sanctions--and by impressing upon the Soviets that their entire relationship with the United States was bound to worsen and that other objectives, which were important to them, would be jeopardized if they continued to press us in Berlin.

The President, I think, had a very good intuitive as well as rational understanding of these basic realities in the situation. If you start with this kind of an appraisal of the situation, then obviously you are pretty careful in specific instances as to what you do. You avoid empty gestures. You do those things which are absolutely essential to protect your vital interests, and you restrain the more hot-headed of your subordinates from doing things which merely exacerbate the situation but do not strengthen your own position. The President did not, of course, hesitate to take chances, calculated risks, in order to defend our interests. He did not like being pushed around by the Soviets any more than his advisers, and he sometimes reacted with temper to things they were doing, just as his

advisers sometimes did. But by and large, I think, the President's approach was rational, calculated, and did not lose sight of the basic and vital interests of the United States. He did not allow the heat of the moment to override his sound judgment on the major elements that were involved in the Berlin situation.

Mr. Sweet: Were there many instances, in the process of trying to agree upon a common Allied policy, when the President felt obliged to intervene personally with Chancellor Adenauer or General de Gaulle or Mr. MacMillan?

Minister Hillenbrand: There was a great deal of personal correspondence of various kinds between the Allied heads of governments principally concerned with the Berlin problem during this critical period. Most of this correspondence is still privileged, and I would not attempt to describe the contents. In some cases, the contents did leak in part or become available to the press, but much of this correspondence still remains in the highly classified category. I think it is fair to say that the President did not write letters merely for the sake of writing letters. He didn't feel that exchanges of correspondence between heads of governments had a social function to perform. He regarded such exchanges as essentially a means of assisting in the achievement of agreement in areas where disagreement existed, or as a way of accelerating agreement when agreement seemed to be slow in coming. I think, therefore, you would not find that this correspondence, if you could examine it in its totality, would give you a comprehensive picture of what had happened over the period of time involved, but it would be to a degree, ad hoc, dealing with specific problems as they arose. I might say that the President always went over this correspondence himself before it went out in final form, and added his own stylistic touches to it. Some of it achieved a certain eloquence.

Mr. Sweet: Was his customary practice to ask, for example, you to draft letters to Chancellor Adenauer and then let it go to the White

House or was the drafting done elsewhere?

Minister Hillenbrand: Much of the initial drafting of this kind of material would be done in the Task Force if it related to Berlin. Then it would work its way up the departmental hierarchy and over to the White House. Anything of importance that went to the President was always concurred in by the Secretary of State before it went over. In fact the Secretary would sometimes take it over himself to get the President's approval.

Mr. Sweet: Taking the Kennedy years as a whole, how would you assess the President's German policy? What was accomplished?

Minister Hillenbrand: Defining German policy in its broadest sense to include the Berlin problem, one can say that one thing accomplished during the Kennedy administration was the resolution of the Berlin crisis, which had begun in November 1958, not in the sense of finding a solution which was agreed to by the Western powers and the Soviet Union and formalized in a document signed by them, but a resolution of a kind which many had thought was the most we could hope to get anyway--a resolution which consisted of putting the Berlin problem on ice, removing it from the forefront of major disputes between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies, reducing the explosive potential which it had had for a period of some four years or more.

I might say that this was accomplished without any significant deterioration of our position in Berlin and, in some respects, with an improvement of that position. After all, Berlin is economically, and in many other ways, better off now than it was at the beginning of the Berlin crisis. The Wall is obviously a regrettable and horrible phenomenon which cuts the city in two. On the other hand, though it has created tragedy for many individuals both in West Berlin and in East Germany, the fact of the Wall has not basically prevented the growth of the West Berlin economy, even of its general morale and hope for the future. So I think it fair to

say that President Kennedy's policy achieved perhaps as much success as any person could reasonably have expected, given the basic facts of our position in Berlin. Now with respect to German policy as a whole, all one can say is that the Kennedy administration did as much as any previous administration and accomplished no more and no less. The fact is that Germany is no more united now than it was in 1946. Efforts have been made to achieve reunification ever since the end of World War II. The Kennedy administration espoused the cause of German reunification as an ultimate objective in a number of ways. There was a realistic recognition that unification was not something that the Soviet Union, under circumstances that we could anticipate in our time, would be willing to grant, as long as the Soviet assessment of its own security involved hanging on to the GDR.

On the other hand, the Kennedy administration did in general encourage the Germans to attempt to open up their relations with the Eastern European countries and to achieve thereby, as a long-range objective, that encirclement of the GDR by relatively more liberal Communist regimes. Perhaps this process, in the long run, might lead to such a pronounced development of the incongruities in the position of the GDR, and to such changed conditions in Central and Eastern Europe that, at some point in the future--the precise timing of which is of course totally unpredictable--the Soviet Union might make a strategic reassessment of the importance of the GDR to its security. Having concluded that the GDR was no longer so vital to its own security under these changed conditions, it might then be prepared to arrive at some sort of a negotiated resolution of the German problem which could lead to reunification. I think this approach, while perhaps never articulated in precisely the terms that I have just indicated, was certainly consistent with the encouragement given to the Germans by the Kennedy administration which I have mentioned. At least one can say that nothing was done during the Kennedy administration that made the prospects of unification any worse, and the beginnings of an approach

were developed which provided a theoretical road by which reunification could be attained over the long run.

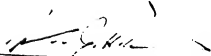
Mr. Sweet: One heard a good deal during those years about a modus vivendi. Was the result which you have described with this putting on ice, as it were, of the Berlin situation--is that what was meant by a modus vivendi? Have we achieved that as a result of the Kennedy years, or was something else thought of in terms of a modus vivendi?

Minister Hillenbrand: The term modus vivendi is a fairly broad one; it could describe nothing more than a de facto resolution of the problem such as we have achieved, a resolution which is essentially a dampening down of the crisis. A modus vivendi could also refer to a more specific agreement reached with the Soviet Union by the Western Allies, which could have had much the same effect. The term modus vivendi would seem to preclude any radical resolution of the problem itself. During the extensive talks which took place between the Soviet Union and the United States the expression became a convenient way of describing what we realistically hoped might come out of these talks. Those exploratory talks or probes never got to the point of establishing that there was any basis for meaningful negotiations. I think it is fair, in any event, to use the term modus vivendi to describe the point at which we arrived after the Cuban crisis, a modus vivendi based, as I said, not upon a negotiated arrangement but simply upon a de facto state of affairs, towards the achievement of which the Kennedy policies of 1961 and 1962, apart from the Cuban crisis, also made a definite contribution.

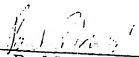
Mr. Sweet: Do you think that good opportunities were missed to accomplish something more positive during this period?

Minister Hillenbrand: It's hard to see how one could have done anything more. It is obviously always possible, in the light of hindsight, to say it would have been better to have done this in a different way, perhaps we should have put more pressure on here, less pressure on there. But

by and large, I think the conclusion of history will be that there were no major opportunities missed, that is opportunities to achieve a radical solution of either the German problem or the Berlin problem. The conflict of interests and the conflict of positions was so clear and so extreme that I certainly know of no way in which we might have conducted ourselves, consistent with our own interests in the situation and the interests of our Allies, which could have led to the kind of agreement with the Soviets which, not having been attained, could really be described as a missed opportunity.



Martin J. Hillenbrand
American Minister
Bonn



Paul R. Sweet
American Consul General
Stuttgart